

5-10-1976

Bicentennial Observance (1976): Correspondence 01

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Recommended Citation

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Mr Biddle
FYI

May 10, 1976

Dear Jack:

I appreciate very much your letter of April 30th keeping me up to date on your efforts to find a legislative solution to the need for a new "Bicentennial Era" initiative at the Federal level.

As I understand the current status, your subcommittee has agreed to incorporate such a program as a free-standing part of Title V of the Arts and Humanities Reauthorization Bill. The program would function under the aegis of the National Endowment for the Humanities on a "challenge grant" 50-50 matching basis.

As you know, I have been very much concerned that the program have its own identity and leadership. This seems to me to be fundamentally important, if we are to have focused program leadership and adequate public recognition of what we are trying to accomplish. But I do recognize the problem you face and understand that you are working with the "art of the possible." In this framework, you have made gratifying progress.

However, if the program must be initiated as a part of NEH, it seems to me that the crucial need is to include language in Title V that will maximize the chances that it will be distinctive and will be operated for the purposes we all envision. I have three suggestions in this regard.

First, of course, is the substance of the program. I would urge consideration of language similar

to that already in the Mathias-Schroeder bills -- such themes as citizen participation, strengthening democratic processes, finding new ways to resolve social and economic problems, developing new methods of setting goals locally and nationally.

Second, would it not be well to specify that the program have its own advisory committee, even though it is part of NEH? Such a committee would provide added assurance that the program would adhere to its objectives and not be used for broader NEH purposes.

Third, I would hope that the appropriation would include a small amount for administration -- perhaps no more than \$500,000 -- so that the program would have its own staff. This would clearly fix responsibility.

I realize, of course, there still remains much to be done before this legislation is finally passed and funded. Please be assured that we here will do everything we can to assist you and your colleagues.

Again, my deep appreciation for your vision in seeing this need and your willingness to do everything you can to accomplish it. I truly believe that in the end it will be an extremely significant and rewarding achievement.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockefeller 3rd

The Honorable Jacob K. Javits
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

bcc: Jack Harr
Gary Khisely
Bill Ruder